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ARMY RESERVE COMPONENTS

Minimum Essential Equipment for Training Has Not Been Effectively Managed

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-238819

May 25, 1990

The Honorable John P. Murtha
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to your August 2, 1989, request, we have assessed the Army's Minimum Essential Equipment for Training (MEET) program. The objectives of our review were to (1) assess the accuracy of the Army's reported minimum equipment requirements, (2) ascertain the extent to which requirements had been filled, and (3) identify factors that have impeded the Army's ability to fill requirements.

You expressed concern that shortages of essential equipment continue to hamper Army National Guard and Army Reserve efforts to conduct effective training, despite the millions of dollars designated to obtain equipment for the reserves.

Results in Brief

Our review indicated that the Army has not effectively managed the MEET program. Specifically, the Army has not established specific criteria and objectives to accurately identify MEET requirements, has not ensured that all units report critical equipment needs, has not provided for updating the requirements list, and has not actively managed the program since 1987. As a result, the current list of requirements that comprises the MEET program is outdated and inaccurate, and the Army still does not know the specific items and their quantities that are essential to training its reserve component units.

Background

The Army initiated the MEET program in 1983 to improve the training readiness of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. Its purpose was to identify, by unit, specific types and quantities of equipment that were critical to training in reserve component units and to give those units priority over others in the issue of that equipment.

The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans (DCSOPS) has primary responsibility for the program, including the publication of regulations to govern the program and to identify requirements. The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics, is responsible

for entering the list of the MEET requirements into the Army's Equipment Release Priority System, which determines the priority that specific Army units are assigned in receiving equipment. The Army Materiel Command, which manages the issue of equipment in accordance with these priorities, is responsible for tracking the issuance and status of the equipment within the Army. The Office of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the Forces Command prepare and forward lists of required equipment to DCSOPS and manages the distribution of MEET items for National Guard and Army Reserve units.

In November 1987, DCSOPS established a MEET list of items that it identified as critical to training reserve component units. The list included 167 units and about 380 equipment items, ranging from 50-caliber machine guns to radar warning systems. The list was given priority ahead of the Army's Master Priority List, which assigns priority for equipment distribution according to a unit's wartime deployment date (i.e., the first to deploy in wartime receives equipment first). According to Army logistics officials, any MEET items that become available in the distribution system would be automatically issued in priority order to fill the requirements of units on the MEET list. The Army Materiel Command reports monthly any items that have been issued to fill MEET requirements and those requirements that remain outstanding. In its 1989 Posture Statement, which was presented to the House Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, the Army reported that it had identified its MEET requirements and that its equipment distribution system had filled 63 percent of those requirements.

The Army Has Not Identified the Minimum Equipment Essential for Training in Reserve Component Units

Our review showed that the Army had not adequately identified the MEET requirements when it initiated the program, and it had not updated the MEET list to reflect organizational or mission changes. Therefore, it has no assurance that the items on the list represent the unmet minimum equipment needs for training. Moreover, when we contacted a sample of units from the list, we found that many of them were not aware of the program, did not know that their units were on the list, and did not need some of the listed items.

Criteria for MEET Program Were Not Established

In 1983, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff directed that lists of equipment considered critical to training be prepared. That same year, the National Guard Bureau and Forces Command compiled lists of critical items based on information from their units. These lists, when combined, contained requests by specific units for about 600 different equipment items.[1] The following year, when the Vice Chief of Staff decided to make MEET a part of normal Army operations, the National Guard Bureau and Forces Command obtained information from their units and developed new lists for the 1985 compilation. This second compilation included more than 500 different equipment items and nearly 1,600 of the reserve component's approximately 4,000 units.

However, no one in this process ever defined MEET program objectives or established specific criteria for determining which items were critical to training. Neither Forces Command nor the National Guard Bureau provided objectives or adequate criteria to guide commanders in their selections. It was not specified, for instance, whether items should relate to a unit's Mission Essential Task List, nor was it stated which level of training (individual or unit) the program was to support.[2] Unit commanders were simply asked to list the top 10 MEET items they did not have.

According to Army memoranda, the master list compiled in 1985 from the second survey reflected unit commanders' confusion and misinterpretation of guidelines. They had listed a wide range of items, some of which they were not authorized and some of which were in short supply throughout the Army. The number of MEET requests prompted DCSOPS to hold up the program until it could assess the effect such a large reassignment of priorities would have on readiness and equipment distribution.

The program remained in abeyance until late 1987, when the Army decided that the MEET list would be limited to (1) units reporting nondeployable (C-4) status for equipment on hand and (2) items that were essential to the mission of those units.[3] Items already included on the Army's Critical List (items that were short Army- wide), as well as any items for which a unit had no authorization, were also deleted. Thus, the

[1]Although records regarding MEET during 1984 are not available, Army memoranda indicate that over 180 reserve component units received equipment as a result of this effort.

[2]A Mission Essential Task List is a constrained, prioritized list of essential wartime tasks that is used to develop training plans and to evaluate units' proficiency.

[3]Non-deployable, or C-4, status indicates that a unit requires additional resources to undertake its wartime mission but may be directed to undertake parts of its mission with resources on hand.

MEET list, reduced to 167 units, was entered into the Army's automated equipment distribution system, where it received a priority ahead of normal distribution.

Although the application of these criteria reduced the MEET list to more manageable proportions, it might have caused valid requirements to be deleted. For instance, logistics officials in the Fifth and the Sixth Army headquarters and the National Guard Bureau objected to deleting units reporting a higher readiness status than C-4 for equipment on hand on the basis that a higher readiness rating would not necessarily mean that the unit met MEET requirements. For example, we identified a division that had reported C-3 status for equipment on hand (meaning that the unit had the resources to undertake the major portions of its wartime mission) even though it lacked specific items such as communications equipment and night vision devices, the lack of which the commander believed would impair the division's ability to conduct training.

Procedures to Determine Requirements Did Not Ensure That All Units Were Included

The Army did not establish controls to ensure that all reserve component units were included in the MEET program. An Army survey of units was conducted rather hurriedly (within a 2-month period in 1985), and the unit commanders were given very little time in which to respond. The commander of a Special Forces unit, for example, told us that he had not been able to respond at all because his unit had been away on active duty training when the request came in, and the deadline for responding had passed by the time his unit returned.

Moreover, record-keeping for the program was inadequate. Records of responses were not retained, and these responses were subjected to undocumented screening processes that deleted some units and equipment. As a result, the Army cannot determine what percentage of its reserve units responded and thus cannot be certain that all requirements were included in the MEET lists.

No Procedures Were Established to Ensure MEET List Was Updated

Although the Army's early plans for MEET included a provision to update the program annually, Army personnel told us that not one unit or item has been added since the second list was compiled in 1985. Yet, since that time, Army Reserve units alone have undergone over 2,500 changes in organization and equipment assignments, and some new units have been formed. Consequently, the MEET list does not reflect current unit requirements and includes requirements that are no longer valid.

For example, we contacted 20 units on the 1987 MEET list and found that 13 did not know that they were on the list, 10 were not even aware of the MEET program, and 1 no longer existed. These 20 units had a total of 49 equipment items listed as minimum equipment needed for training, but due to organizational changes, 9 units were no longer authorized 13 (27 percent) of these items. Another six items were still authorized, but unit representatives told us that not having them had not significantly affected training. Conversely, officials from seven (37 percent) of the units said that they were lacking mission essential items critical to training that were not on the MEET list.

No new units are represented on the list. For instance, the National Guard's 29th Light Infantry Division was activated in September 1985, after the MEET requirements were compiled. According to state National Guard officials, none of the division's units, which comprise about 60 percent of the Virginia National Guard, are included in the MEET program. The officials said that the division and other Guard units were lacking equipment they considered essential to training, but they had not attempted to add their units' requirements to the MEET program because they believed that the program was no longer active.

MEET Has Not Been Actively Managed Since 1987

During 1983 and 1984, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff was directly interested and involved in the MEET program. After the program was institutionalized, however, that emphasis was lost. According to Army officials, their involvement since 1987 has been limited to periodically monitoring reports showing MEET equipment requirements still unfilled. Efforts to establish standard MEET requirements for specific types of units have been abandoned, and attempts to publish an Army regulation covering MEET were discontinued in 1988. Although DCSOPS officials still do not know what specific items and quantities of equipment are essential for training, they have no further plans to identify MEET requirements.

Currently, MEET consists of the computerized list of units and line items of equipment revised and adopted in 1987. About 121 units and 227 line items remain outstanding, but no one is actively managing the program. Although the Army Materiel Command periodically produces automated status reports on MEET and a few items on the list continue to be issued, the program is essentially inactive.

Army officials told us that perhaps one reason that the Army has not actively managed the MEET program is that the equipment posture of

reserve components has significantly improved in recent years. According to these officials, this improvement is largely attributable to the Dedicated Procurement Program. Each year since 1981, the Congress has appropriated money under this program for equipment specifically to improve the readiness and capability of the reserve components. This money has been provided to the National Guard and Army Reserve in addition to that portion of the Army budget allocated to them.

Since 1981, the Army Reserve has received about $900 million, and the National Guard has received about $1.5 billion under the Dedicated Procurement Program. The Congress earmarks most of these funds by specifying the particular equipment to be purchased but includes an additional amount for miscellaneous items. The Dedicated Procurement Program, along with a concerted effort by the Army to redistribute available assets, has allowed the Army to reduce the number of reserve component units that are not equipped to undertake their wartime missions. For example, the number of reserve component units reporting non-deployable (C-4) status for equipment was reduced from 752 in October 1987 to 481 in May 1989.

Conclusions

Although the Army has recognized a need to ensure that reserve component units have at least the equipment essential for training their personnel, efforts to establish a program to provide that equipment have not been managed effectively. The Army's interest in this program has waned. More than 6 years after the program was initiated, the Army still had not established, and had no plans to establish, specific criteria for the program.

Moreover, despite its earlier efforts in the MEET program and the large amount of equipment provided to the reserve components under the Dedicated Procurement Program, the Army still has no assurance that units have the minimum amounts of equipment needed for effective training. The latest MEET list, compiled in 1987, did not accurately reflect MEET requirements then, and because it has not been updated, it has become increasingly inaccurate. Consequently, we believe that the Army's report to the House Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, in 1989, asserting that the MEET program was satisfying equipment requirements, was inaccurate.

Recommendations

In light of the insufficient management attention given to MEET over the last 6 years, we recommend that the Secretary of the Army determine

whether the MEET program is still the best means for satisfying minimum equipment needs and if it is, ensure that the program is properly managed. The MEET program should be terminated if the Army is not willing to apply the requisite management attention to it.

Whatever system is used to establish priorities for equipment deliveries to Army National Guard and Army Reserve units, the system needs basic information on equipment needs for training. We recommend that, to obtain this information, the Secretary of the Army establish specific criteria to define the minimum essential equipment needed to train effectively and clearly state the level of training to be supported.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

The Department of Defense agreed with our findings and recommendations (see app. I) and stated that the Army will (1) review the MEET program and decide by September 30, 1990, on the best means to provide the minimum equipment necessary for adequate readiness training in reserve component units and (2) review MEET criteria and develop a corrective action plan by September 30, 1990.

Scope and Methodology

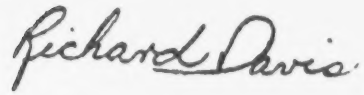
To obtain information on the program's background, establishment of the MEET list, and current program activities, we contacted officials of and reviewed documentation issued by the Department of the Army's Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations and Plans and for Logistics; the Office of the Chief, Army Reserves; Headquarters, Training and Doctrine Command; the National Guard Bureau; Headquarters, Forces Command; and three reserve component units. We also contacted 20 units on the MEET list to determine their awareness of MEET, their continuing need for specific items on the list, and their need for any items not on the list.

We conducted our work from July 1989 through February 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 15 days from the date of its issue. At that time, we will send copies to interested congressional committees; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and the Secretaries of Defense and the Army. We will also make copies available to other parties on request.

Please call me at (202) 275-4141 if you or your staff have any questions. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.

Sincerely yours,



Richard Davis
Director, Army Issues

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Comments From the Department of Defense

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

RESERVE AFFAIRS

MAY 9 1990

Mr. Frank C. Conahan
Assistant Comptroller General
National Security and International
Affairs Division
United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Conahan:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the draft GAO Report entitled, "ARMY RESERVE COMPONENTS: Minimum Essential Equipment for Training Has Not Been Effectively Managed," dated March 22, 1990 (GAO Code 393356/OSD Case 8278).

The Department concurs with the findings and recommendations contained in the draft report, except that the Department disagrees with the GAO inference that the Army Report to the House Appropriations Committee was misleading. The Department plans to actively address the deficiencies cited in the draft report.

See comment 1.

The Army will review the Minimum Essential Equipment for Training program. By September 30, 1990, the Army will recommend to the Office of the Secretary of Defense the best means to satisfy the requirements for providing minimal resources to allow adequate readiness training in all Reserve component units.

The detailed DoD comments on the GAO findings and recommendations are provided at the enclosure. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report.

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Duncan

Stephen M. Duncan

Enclosure:
As stated

The following is GAO's comment on the Department of Defense's letter dated May 9, 1990.

GAO Comment

1. The enclosure has not been included. With the exception of the inference contained in our characterization of the Army's report, the enclosure merely restates our findings and conclusions and what is contained in the letter. We have changed the report to reflect the Department's comment regarding our use of the term "misleading."

Major Contributors to This Report

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